Thanks for your interest in

**Capital Punishment**

It is my hope that the information in this booklet will help you understand what the Bible teaches.
About the Author

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Introduction
Capital punishment is one of those fiery issues that often sparks discussions that generate more heat than light. Proponents vehemently support the death penalty saying that it deters crime. Opponents scream foul and say that it is cruel and unusual punishment.

Since there are Christians on both sides of the debate, many churches avoid addressing the issue for fear of alienating church members or causing division. But capital punishment is an important topic and needs to be addressed.

As with any volatile issue, the question is not, “What is one person’s opinion as opposed to another’s?”, but “What does Scripture say?” If God’s Word is unclear on the subject then Christians must not take too strong a stand either way. If, however, the Bible is clear, believers need to adopt God’s view no matter how they feel or how many arguments there are to the contrary. And the good thing is, God is always right!

With these thoughts in mind let’s delve into the subject.

A Definition of capital punishment
Capital punishment may be defined as administering the death penalty to humans who commit certain crimes. This definition raises several questions, “Is it right or wrong to put people to death?”, “What crimes, if any, deserve the death penalty?”, and “Who, if anyone, has the right to put someone to death?” These and other relevant questions will be answered using the following outline:

Preliminary questions about capital punishment
Are there crimes that warrant capital punishment?
Is it right for certain people to carry out the death penalty?
Is capital punishment really that important?
Answering the arguments against capital punishment
Summary principles

Preliminary questions about capital punishment
Perhaps the most basic question for the Christian in regard to capital punishment is “Does Scripture clearly address it?”

*Does Scripture clearly address the subject?*
Again, if the Bible does not address capital punishment, the debate reverts to human opinion with no final authority. If, however, Scripture gives clear instruction then It is the final authority.

The death penalty is addressed many times in Scripture. Not only does the Bible address it, It overwhelmingly supports the death penalty both in the Old and New Testaments. The support from the Old Testament will be seen in the section, “Are there crimes that warrant capital punishment?” The support from the New Testament will be seen in the section, “Answering the arguments against capital punishment.”

The fact that Scripture overwhelmingly supports capital punishment is a sobering reminder that God is not only loving but also holy and just. As the support is unveiled you may think, “Wow, God certainly is strict!” And you would be right. God views human life, parental authority, family integrity and personal holiness as critical ingredients in maintaining peace, harmony, and safety in society.

Although God only authorizes capital punishment for a relatively small number of crimes, it must be remembered that He does so for the good of society as a whole. Failure to deal appropriately with crime leads society down a slippery slope of moral decay much as we see today in our own country.
Before looking at the specific support in the Old Testament, it is appropriate to answer the question, “Does the Old Testament Law still apply?”

**Does the Old Testament Law still apply?**

Opponents of capital punishment often want to throw out the Old Testament, saying that it no longer applies. There is no doubt that God has done away with certain dietary and religious laws from the Old Testament, but there is no indication anywhere in Scripture that He has done away with His moral standards. An example of a change in dietary laws is found in Acts 10:9-16 which tells the story of Peter and the great sheet coming down from heaven.

9 And on the next day, as they were on their way, and approaching the city, Peter went up on the housetop about the sixth hour to pray. 10 And he became hungry, and was desiring to eat; but while they were making preparations, he fell into a trance; 11 and he beheld the sky opened up, and a certain object like a great sheet coming down, lowered by four corners to the ground, 12 and there were in it all kinds of four-footed animals and crawling creatures of the earth and birds of the air. 13 And a voice came to him, "Arise, Peter, kill and eat!" 14 But Peter said, "By no means, Lord, for I have never eaten anything unholy and unclean." 15 And again a voice {came} to him a second time, "What God has cleansed, no {longer} consider unholy." 16 And this happened three times; and immediately the object was taken up into the sky.

Peter did not want to eat the food on the sheet because he believed it to be unclean based on the Levitical law (Leviticus 11). But God informed him that it was a new day, and that He had made these items fit for human consumption.
The sheet coming down from heaven was also a picture of the Gentiles who the Jews had considered unclean. They were now being drawn to God and declared clean through the blood of Christ as they received Him as Lord and Savior.

A passage that shows change in religious as well as dietary laws is Colossians 2:16-17,

16 Therefore let no one act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day-- 17 things which are a {mere} shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ.

Prior to Christ’s death and resurrection there were strict laws regarding the Sabbath and other holy days. It was a capital offense for a Jew to break the Sabbath. But since Christ came, the day of worship has changed from the traditional Sabbath (Saturday) to Sunday (the Lord’s Day). This is the day when Christ rose from the dead. In Colossians, Paul tells the Colossians that no one should judge them in regard to dietary laws, the breaking of the Sabbath or other religious days. These were things that were only a shadow of what was to come. The substance now belongs to Christ who saves all people who place their faith in Him. Through Him, believers move into their Sabbath rest thus making the keeping of the traditional Sabbath and religious festivals obsolete.

Another New Testament passage that addresses food is 1 Timothy 4:3-5

3 men who forbid marriage and advocate abstaining from foods, which God has created to be gratefully shared in by those who believe and know the truth. 4 For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected, if it is
received with gratitude; 5 for it is sanctified by means of the word of God and prayer.

All food is acceptable to eat if it is received with gratitude and prayer.

Although there is evidence that God has changed His dietary and religious standards, there is no indication that He has changed His moral law. In Matthew 5:17-9 Jesus said,

17 Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish, but to fulfill. 18 For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass away from the Law, until all is accomplished. 19 Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and so teaches others, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches {them,} he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

Once Jesus had accomplished everything He came to do, which included dying for our sins and rising from the dead, a few laws changed, but not the moral law. In subsequent verses in Matthew chapter five Jesus goes on to address several moral issues: murder (vv21-26), adultery (vv27-32), making vows (vv33-37), revenge (vv38-42), and love/hate (vv43-47).

Are there crimes that warrant capital punishment?
Let’s now look at some of the verses in the Bible which clearly address morality and capital punishment. Genesis 9:6 states, "Whoever sheds man's blood, by man his blood shall be shed, for in the image of God He made man.”
This verse gives the most basic reason for capital punishment; murder... There are exceptions to this, however, as in Exodus 22:2, "If the thief is caught while breaking in, and is struck so that he dies, there will be no bloodguiltiness on his account." If a person is breaking into a home and is killed, the one who kills him is not liable. The same is true if the death is accidental. Exodus 21:12-17 speaks of accidental death and the opportunity for a person to flee to a City of Refuge. The passage also mentions other capital crimes.

12 "He who strikes a man so that he dies shall surely be put to death. 13 "But if he did not lie in wait {for him}, but God let {him} fall into his hand, then I will appoint you a place to which he may flee. 14 "If, however, a man acts presumptuously toward his neighbor, so as to kill him craftily, you are to take him {even} from My altar, that he may die. 15 "And he who strikes his father or his mother shall surely be put to death. 16 "And he who kidnaps a man, whether he sells him or he is found in his possession, shall surely be put to death. 17 "And he who curses his father or his mother shall surely be put to death.

These verses clarify that premeditated murder, physical violence against parents, kidnapping, and cursing parents are all worthy of the death penalty. It is probable that cursing ones parents went way beyond simply swearing at them. It involved children actually putting a curse on them.

Leviticus 20:7-16, 22,23 reveals more crimes warranting the death penalty,

7 'You shall consecrate yourselves therefore and be holy, for I am the LORD your God. 8 'And you shall keep My statutes and practice them; I am the LORD who sanctifies you. 9 'If
{there is} anyone who curses his father or his mother, he shall surely be put to death; he has cursed his father or his mother, his bloodguiltiness is upon him. 10 'If {there is} a man who commits adultery with another man's wife, one who commits adultery with his friend's wife, the adulterer and the adulteress shall surely be put to death. 11 'If {there is} a man who lies with his father's wife, he has uncovered his father's nakedness; both of them shall surely be put to death, their bloodguiltiness is upon them. 12 'If {there is} a man who lies with his daughter-in-law, both of them shall surely be put to death; they have committed incest, their bloodguiltiness is upon them. 13 'If {there is} a man who lies with a male as those who lie with a woman, both of them have committed a detestable act; they shall surely be put to death. Their bloodguiltiness is upon them. 14 'If {there is} a man who marries a woman and her mother, it is immorality; both he and they shall be burned with fire, that there may be no immorality in your midst. 15 'If {there is} a man who lies with an animal, he shall surely be put to death; you shall also kill the animal. 16 'If {there is} a woman who approaches any animal to mate with it, you shall kill the woman and the animal; they shall surely be put to death. Their bloodguiltiness is upon them....

22 'You are therefore to keep all My statutes and all My ordinances and do them, so that the land to which I am bringing you to live will not spew you out. 23 'Moreover, you shall not follow the customs of the nation which I shall drive out before you, for they did all these things, and therefore I have abhorred them.

These verses state that cursing ones parents, adultery, other sexual sins like incest, homosexual acts, and bestiality are all worthy of death.
Again, for the health and safety of society, God laid down strict laws. Notice that in verses 22 and 23 God told Israel to keep all of His statutes and ordinances so that they might not be spewed out of the land, much like a person who accidentally drinks sour milk spits it out of his mouth. God wants His people to be pure. He wants them to be different in a good sense, and to live according to His ways so that He may pour out His blessings on them.

Exodus 22:18-19 speaks of yet another crime worthy of death, “18 You shall not allow a sorceress to live. 19 Whoever lies with an animal shall surely be put to death.”

These verses teach that those who practice witchcraft should receive the death penalty, and it reaffirms that those who practice bestiality should pay with their lives. Both practices are a great threat to the safety, stability and moral well-being of society.

Leviticus 20:2 states,

"You shall also say to the sons of Israel, 'Any man from the sons of Israel or from the aliens sojourning in Israel, who gives any of his offspring to Molech, shall surely be put to death; the people of the land shall stone him with stones.’”

If anyone was caught sacrificing his child to a god, he was to be put to death. Unfortunately there were those who would offer their children as sacrifices to pagan gods. God took an extremely dim view of this practice.

Deuteronomy 21:18-21 states,
18 "If any man has a stubborn and rebellious son who will not obey his father or his mother, and when they chastise him, he will not even listen to them, 19 then his father and mother shall seize him, and bring him out to the elders of his city at the gateway of his home town. 20 "And they shall say to the elders of his city, 'This son of ours is stubborn and rebellious, he will not obey us, he is a glutton and a drunkard.' 21 "Then all the men of his city shall stone him to death; so you shall remove the evil from your midst, and all Israel shall hear {of it} and fear.

Children who rebelled and refused to listen to their parents were worthy of capital punishment. The passage indicates that this is not mild rebellion, but the type where a child is completely out of control. Notice, too, that it is the parents who make the decision whether or not to take their child to the elders of the city. They may choose to take their child or they may choose to keep working with him. In addition, this principle indicates that God does not have an age limit on capital punishment. If a child commits a capital crime he may be put to death.

All of the above mentioned crimes are illustrative of the types of things in Scripture that God says are worthy of the death penalty. The question now arises, who is to carry out capital punishment?

Is it right for certain people to carry out the death penalty?
In the Old Testament it was the community under the authority of the elders who carried out capital punishment. Such methods as stoning and burning were used. Executions were public, and carried out in an expeditious manner so that all would see, fear, and realize the importance of obeying God’s laws.

It must be emphatically stated that individual citizens were not to take the law into their own hands. The same is true today. In other words,
if someone were to murder a person’s wife, the grieving spouse does not have the right to put the offender to death. He must leave that to the governing authorities and the executioners they appoint. There is no room in God’s economy for vigilante justice.

Romans 13:3,4 addresses the place of government and states that ruling authorities have the responsibility for punishing criminals.

> 3 For rulers are not a cause of fear for good behavior, but for evil. Do you want to have no fear of authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same; 4 for it is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath upon the one who practices evil.

Although there are many lesser penalties which warrant lesser punishments, the death penalty is one way that God uses governing authorities as His ministers to bring wrath upon those who commit certain crimes. As sad as it is to see anyone put to death, sometimes it is necessary for the good of society.

God has placed governing authorities in the world to protect law-abiding citizens. If governing authorities are corrupt or fail to carry out God’s plan, individual citizens do not have the right to punish criminals. They do, however, have the right and obligation to work within the legal system to change the laws and to elect officials who will act in accordance with God’s laws. That is one reason it is absolutely necessary for Christians to become politically and socially active. If they fail to do so, they will be forced to live with laws and standards they oppose.
Why is capital punishment so important?
Unfortunately our country has strayed far from God’s laws. We are like a once-clean well that has become polluted with the raw sewage of sin. Not until the leak is stopped will the water become clean again.

Our nation is paying a heavy price for allowing sin to run rampant. Murderers are set free to kill again. Adultery is commonplace. Violent crime is out of control. Children kill parents, teachers and classmates. The streets of most big cities are not safe to walk at night. We have become a nation known for its sexually transmitted diseases, abhorrent lifestyles and violent crime. Why? Because we have neglected God’s law, rejected what He loves, allowed what He hates, and adopted a cultural philosophy which states that there are few if any absolutes.

Can our country be turned around? With God all things are possible. We can only hope that God doesn’t choose to spew us out of the beautiful land which we have polluted with our sin.

In the moral darkness there are some positive signs. Certain cities and states have become so overwhelmed with crime that the public outcry has forced officials to take steps to turn the tide. One example is the “Three Strikes” law in California. It states that if a person commits a third felony, he goes to jail with no chance of parole. This has taken many repeat offenders off the streets permanently, causing the crime rate to drop. Good, right? Yes, but it does not go far enough. Rather than meting out the death penalty on those felons who deserve it, the government simply locks them up and throws away the key leaving taxpayers to foot the bill. And there is a powerful segment of society trying to overturn the law.

A few years ago (and it still may be the case) in South Carolina, the state’s largest employer, was the prison system. Something is drastically wrong!
Unfortunately it seems that we are living in the last days described in 2 Timothy 3:1-5,

1 But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come.  2 For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, 3 unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good, 4 treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God; 5 holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power; and avoid such men as these.

This is an apt description of our society. But what does verse five mean when it says, “holding a form of godliness, although they have denied its power?” The phrase holding a form is the Greek word morphosin and means outward shape. The entire phrase holding a form of godliness means that when one looks at society there seems to be a certain outward form of godliness: people for the most part are outwardly clean, dress nicely, and use deodorant. Many are friendly and even hold to and display some important values like kindness and concern for others. On the outside people appear to be godly, but on the inside they are full of dead men’s bones, just like so many of the Pharisees and Scribes in Jesus’ time (Mt 23:27,28). They flatly deny God’s existence, reject moral absolutes, and refuse to submit to Jesus’ lordship in their lives. They reject God’s Word and say they have come up with their own values. They refuse to give God any credit whatsoever, even though He is the One who created them, sustains them, and gave them every talent and ability they possess. What a sad commentary!
In case you are interested, here is what Jesus said to the Pharisees and Scribes in Matthew 23:27,28.

27 Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which on the outside appear beautiful, but inside they are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness. 28 Even so you too outwardly appear righteous to men, but inwardly you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.

Let’s now examine and address the arguments against capital punishment.

**Answering the arguments against capital punishment**
There are many arguments against capital punishment. Some are biblically-based while others are simply someone’s opinion. All can best be addressed by asking and answering the following questions.

*Does capital punishment violate the ten commandments?*
One of the most basic arguments against capital punishment is that it violates the ten commandments. The commandments are found in Exodus 20. The sixth commandment in verse 13 (King James Version) states, “Thou shalt not kill.” Those who oppose capital punishment say that since capital punishment involves killing, it must be wrong.

The fallacy with this argument is that it fails to understand the word *kill*. The Hebrew word for *kill* is *ratsach*. It is better translated *murder* because it normally refers to an unlawful, premeditated, and deliberate act, like when a bank robber kills a potential witness. Thus, a better rendering of the sixth commandment is, “Thou shalt not murder,” as in the New American Standard Version of the Bible.
Murder is the *unlawful* taking of human life. Killing is *lawful* under certain circumstances, one of them being when a capital crime has been committed (Gen 9:6). Another is when a thief breaks into a home and someone kills him in the process (Exodus 21:12-17).

Capital punishment is lawful killing and does not violate the ten commandments.

**Does capital punishment violate Jesus’ teaching on forgiveness?**

The opponents of capital punishment use Bible passages like *Matthew 6:12-15* where Jesus teaches forgiveness. They say if a person is put to death for a crime then he obviously has not been forgiven. This, however, is faulty reasoning. It is possible for an offended person to forgive a criminal, yet for the government to remove the same criminal from society. For example, if someone raped and killed a person’s daughter, that person would hopefully forgive the criminal, but still want him put to death for the good of society.

Another passage that the opponents of capital punishment use in their opposition to capital punishment is *John 8:3-11* which records the story of the woman who was brought to Jesus because she was caught in the act of adultery. Rather than condemning the woman to death (which was the punishment for adultery), Jesus invited those without sin to cast the first stone. He was not forbidding capital punishment, but simply inviting those without sin to carry it out.

At that time in Jewish history, the Romans, who were in control of Israel, forbid the Jews to carry out their own capital punishment. They had to ask permission of the Romans. If Jesus had said to carry out the capital punishment, He would have violated Roman law and supported vigilante justice (which has already been shown to be against God’s law). If Jesus had said not to carry it out, He would have been viewed as not supporting the Jewish laws of the Old Testament. In His wisdom,
He invited those without sin to throw the first stone. Obviously there was no one without sin in the crowd, and they all eventually drifted away. Jesus then told the woman to go and sin no more.

It must be understood that Jesus was not using this encounter to preach the rightness or wrongness of capital punishment. In fact in one sense He affirmed it by inviting folks to carry it out. Jesus simply and powerfully showed the crowd that all people are sinners and need forgiveness. Soon He would show them through His death and resurrection that He alone could provide the forgiveness they needed.

It is also interesting that the law which called for the woman’s death also called for the death of the man with whom she committed adultery. Surely the Jewish leaders knew the man because the woman had been caught in the very act. Why hadn’t the man been brought to Jesus? Being omniscient Jesus saw the hypocrisy of the people and did not play into their hands. He was not espousing the woman’s innocence, only that everyone else was guilty, too.

Those who use the *forgiveness argument* against capital punishment miss the big picture. There is no doubt that people must forgive each other, but this does not mean the offending party should go free. If his crime is worthy of death, the government has every right to remove him from society permanently. Romans 13:3,4 states that ruling authorities do not bear the sword for nothing, and the sword is a deadly weapon. Governing officials are God’s ministers and authorized to dole out His wrath on those who deserve it.

Capital punishment does not violate Jesus’ teaching on forgiveness!
Does capital punishment violate Romans 12:19?
Romans 12:19 states, “Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for is written, ‘Vengeance is mine, I will repay,’ says the Lord.”

There are those who say that since vengeance is up to God, men should not carry out the death penalty. If God wants to put someone to death, He should do it, not humans. Those who use this argument refer to Acts 5:1-10 as their proof-text which records the incident when God put Ananias and Sapphira to death for lying to the Holy Spirit.

Although personal vengeance is inappropriate, capital punishment authorized by the government is acceptable for certain crimes. God instructed people in the Old Testament to carry out capital punishment. He often uses people to carry out His will. Although capital punishment is carried out by an appointed human executioner, that executioner is working under the auspices of the government, and thus under God. It must also be remembered that just because God at times carried out capital punishment on His own, this does not negate Him using appointed authorities on this earth.

Is capital punishment condoned in the New Testament?
Some of the people who oppose capital punishment say that nowhere in the New Testament is capital punishment condoned. This is simply incorrect. As previously stated Acts 5:1-10 records God carrying out capital punishment against Ananias and Sapphira. 1 Corinthians 11:28-32 states that God put to death some who took the Lord’s supper improperly. Romans 13:1-4 emphasizes that the Government does not bear the sword in vain. Capital punishment certainly is mentioned and condoned in the New Testament.
Is capital punishment a contradiction since all people are worthy of death?

The opponents of capital punishment sometimes accuse its supporters of having a double standard. After all, doesn’t the Bible teach that all people have committed adultery in their hearts (a capital offense) by lusting after others (Mt 5:27-30). Doesn’t it also say that rebellion is like the sin of witchcraft (also a capital offense - 1 Samuel 15:23)? Which of us has not had lustful thoughts? Which of us has not rebelled? Obviously, we all have! Those who hold this argument state that either everyone needs to be put to death, or everyone needs to be pardoned! Since it is ridiculous to put everyone to death, then no one should be executed.

Although this rationale sounds plausible on the surface, it’s reasoning is faulty. It is true that sin is sin. If a person commits the act of adultery or if he thinks lustful thoughts, he is guilty before God and will answer to Him. But God never laid out societal punishment for thoughts. He did, however, prescribe punishments for certain actions. Since none of us can read each others thoughts, we must not become judges in that area. God instructed us to judge actions not thoughts.

When a person has inappropriate thoughts this only confirms that he is a sinner. If he acts on those thoughts, he is to be punished in accordance with the law. Sometimes this punishment may be the death penalty. If, on the other hand, he does not act, he is not to be punished.

A close look at Matthew 5:27-30 shows that Jesus teaches people to police their own thoughts. He is not talking about self-mutilation, but instead about taking serious steps to get thoughts under control before they lead to wrong actions.
27 You have heard that it was said, “You shall not commit adultery”; 28 but I say to you, that everyone who looks on a woman to lust for her has committed adultery with her already in his heart. 29 And if your right eye makes you stumble, tear it out, and throw it from you; for it is better for you that one of the parts of your body perish, than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. 30 And if your right hand makes you stumble, cut it off, and throw it from you; for it is better for you that one of the parts of your body perish, than for your whole body to go into hell.

It must be emphasized again that Jesus is not telling people to mutilate themselves. The real problem is their sinful heart, not their eye or hand. Even if a person cuts off his hand, it still would not solve his heart problem. The central teaching of the passage is that people need to deal seriously with sin. They need to confess it and turn to God. Sin can not only affect a person in this life, but in the life to come.

Do Levitical laws only apply to the Jews, thus making capital punish. obsolete?
Some folks argue that capital punishment is not applicable today because the levitical laws of the Old Testament were given to the Jews under a Theocracy. Since we do not live in a Theocracy the laws must not apply.

It is true that the laws recorded in Leviticus and Deuteronomy were given to Moses when the Jews lived under a theocratic form of government. But so were the Ten Commandments given in the book of Exodus. If the levitical laws don’t apply, then the 10 commandments must not apply either. But they certainly do apply! The Ten Commandments and the levitical laws of the Old Testament are the cornerstone of our Western legal system. Many of our laws were taken directly from the principles contained in them. Even though we have
drifted far from our roots, both the levitical law and the Ten Commandments are totally relevant in modern society.

God gave the Old Testament law to the Jews so that they might show the rest of the world how a society should live. The Jews were to be a witness of God’s greatness causing all nations to bow at His feet. Even though the Jews have failed in their mission, the laws God gave them were eventually to be for all men.

Capital punishment is as relevant today as it ever was.

**Does capital punishment do away with the biblical concept of mercy?**
The opponents of capital punishment say that since God showed mercy to capital offenders, we should too. He spared the life of Cain, the first murderer in the Bible (Genesis 4:4-15). Jesus spared the woman caught in adultery (John 8:3-11).

There is no doubt that God is merciful, but he is also just. He did not tell us why He showed mercy on Cain and the adulterous woman, yet took the life of Ananias and Sapphira. He is all-knowing and has His reasons. He did, however, tell us what to do in the law, and we need to do it.

There may be times when mercy for capital crimes is appropriate, especially when there is some question as to whether a person actually committed the crime. No rational person wants to see innocent people put to death.

Some folks think that if a criminal on death row professes Christ he should be pardoned and considered for parole. Unfortunately if criminals thought they could get released by professing Christ, they would all do it, whether or not their profession was sincere. Only God
knows for sure. The comforting thing is, if a death-row inmate comes to Christ and is subsequently put to death, he will go to heaven.

Is capital punishment cruel and unusual?
Those who oppose capital punishment condemn it as violent and say that it is just as bad or worse than the crimes it seeks to punish. In their opinion hanging, stoning, electrocution, crucifixion, lethal injection, firing squad, or any other form of the death penalty, are all inhumane and should be stopped.

This argument is not valid. Listen to Leviticus 24:19-22,

19 And if a man injures his neighbor, just as he has done, so it shall be done to him: 20 fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth; just as he has injured a man, so it shall be inflicted on him. 21 Thus the one who kills an animal shall make it good, but the one who kills a man shall be put to death. 22 There shall be one standard for you; it shall be for the stranger as well as the native, for I am the LORD your God.

What amazes me is that we are now a society which stresses the rights of the individual above the rights of society. It seems that when someone commits a crime and someone else condemns him, it is the accuser not the criminal who is labeled insensitive and unfeeling.

The fact is many of the crimes for which the death penalty is prescribed in Scripture are violent crimes. Those who oppose capital punishment should stop and think for a moment about those victims whose lives have been devastated by criminals: the mother whose daughter was raped and brutally killed, the father whose son was kidnapped and abused, the girl who will have difficulty ever trusting men because she
was molested by her uncle. Victims and accusers are not criminals. Criminals are criminals!

Although God loves individuals, he set up capital punishment to give stability, safety and sanity to society. When criminals are taken off the streets, communities breathe easier and individuals feel like they can go out at night. When criminals who commit capital crimes are released or not punished, the crime rate escalates and law abiding citizens live in fear.

Human life is precious to God. Men and women are created in God’s image. That is one reason God instituted capital punishment, and why Genesis 9:6 states, "Whoever sheds man’s blood, by man his blood shall be shed, for in the image of God He made man."

Although capital punishment may be violent, it is authorized by God to eliminate those who commit crimes worthy of death.

Is capital punishment a deterrent to crime?
The opponents of capital punishment say that it does not deter crime. This simply is not true. Capital punishment certainly does deter crime. Many capital crimes are committed by repeat offenders. Capital punishment prevents them from committing the same crime again. It also sends a strong message to those who might be thinking of committing similar crimes. Capital punishment will not deter all criminals, but it will deter some, especially those who have been permanently removed from society.

Sadly many criminals have seared consciences. 1 Timothy 4:1,2 states,

1 But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits
and doctrines of demons, 2 by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron.

To sear means to burn. A person whose skin has been severely burned often finds that when it heals it is insensitive to touch. Nerve cells have been damaged. So it is with those who have seared consciences. Repeated sin makes them numb to normal feelings. They can murder without remorse, rape without guilt, and steal without giving it a second thought. These truly are dangerous people who need to be dealt with severely.

Does capital punishment affirm life?
Some of those who oppose capital punishment say that it is inconsistent with the biblical view that life is precious. They say it is inconsistent for Christians to save babies from abortion, but put criminals to death.

All life is precious, especially human life. God created man in His own image (Genesis 1:26,27). That is why capital punishment is the ultimate affirmation of life. It makes the clear statement that those who wrongfully take the life of another human must forfeit their own. When a criminal who has murdered someone is not put to death, it shows gross lack of respect for the life of the one who was murdered. It also shows total disregard for the law of God.

When a person takes another’s life, he should lose his own. Those who see this consequence will understand that life and morality are indeed sacred.

Does capital punishment leave room for rehabilitation?
Those who oppose capital punishment say that it does not leave room for rehabilitation. They believe that many criminals who are put to
death could be rehabilitated and placed back into society to become productive citizens.

There is no doubt that some folks can be rehabilitated and plugged back into society, but the fact remains that many who are released become repeat offenders. One statistic showed that 1 in 11 convicted murders had already committed a previous homicide. That means that 1 out of every 11 people who was murdered died because man was not willing to do what God said.

When God laid out His standards for capital punishment, He said nothing about rehabilitation. He knew the dangers. That is why it is imperative that those in prison, especially those death row, be given the opportunity to receive Christ, but not receive mitigated sentences.

**Does capital punishment remove the chance for restitution?**

Some folks say that capital punishment is wrong because it removes criminals from society before they have the opportunity to repay their debt. For example, Exodus 22:1,4 states,

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1  If a man steals an ox or a sheep, and slaughters it or sells it, he shall pay five oxen for the ox and four sheep for the sheep... 4   If what he stole is actually found alive in his possession, whether an ox or a donkey or a sheep, he shall pay double.
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As stated above, God calls people to repay their debt for non-capital offenses, but He does not call people to repay their debt for capital crimes. He simply calls them to pay for the offense with their lives.
Is capital punishment unfair?
Those who oppose capital punishment say it is unfair because those who have enough money can often get pardoned no matter what crime they commit.

There is no doubt that we have an imperfect legal system. Many cases can be sighted to prove the injustices. Although we need to work hard to fix these problems, those who commit capital crimes are still worthy of death, no matter if others who committed similar crimes were able to beat the system.

Does capital punishment risk putting innocent people to death?
There are cases of innocent people being put to death for crimes they did not commit. But with the appeal system and DNA testing this is becoming more rare. Precautions should be taken to prevent innocent people from being put to death, but just because the system sometimes fails, this is no reason to do away with it. It would be like doing away with all seat belts in cars because some have failed.

Summary Principles
Her is a brief summary of many of the principles covered in this paper.
- God instituted capital punishment
- God said that certain crimes are worthy of death
- God provided certain exceptions regarding the death penalty
- God authorized capital punishment to be carried out by governing authorities
- God did not put an age limit on the death penalty
- Both the Old and New Testaments affirm capital punishment
- Capital punishment does not violate the 10 commandments
- Jesus’ teaching does not negate capital punishment
- Capital punishment does not violate Romans 12:19
- Capital punishment is not a contradiction
- Capital punishment is not cruel and unusual
- Capital punishment deters crime
- Capital punishment affirms life
- Capital punishment is fair and just

In closing, here are some informative statistics taken from a government website on crime. In 1960 there were 16 million people in California. That year there were 616 murders. In 1993 the population of the state had not quite doubled (31 million) and yet the murder rate had gone up nearly seven times to over 4,000. Other violent crimes had skyrocketed as well.

One study showed that approximately one out of eleven people convicted of murder had already been previously convicted of homicide. This means that over 363 murders were committed in California that year by repeat offenders who had been released back into society. 363 innocent people and their families suffered needlessly because government failed to carry out it’s God-given responsibility.

As sad as it is to see people put to death, capital punishment is one of God’s ways of keeping society from spinning out of control. God’s way works, man’s way doesn’t. It is my prayer that we can turn the tide and return to some semblance of godliness before it is too late.